

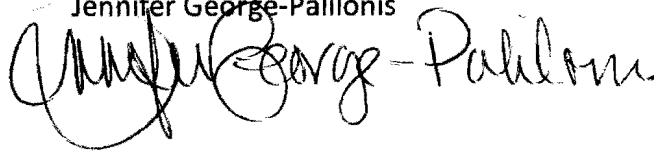
**iMedia, iMe:
My Experience with Ball State University's Interactive Media Project**

An Honors Thesis (HONORS 499)

by

Kathleen Bostdorff

Thesis Advisor
Jennifer George-Palilonis

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jennifer George-Palilonis". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with some overlapping letters.

Ball State University
Muncie, Indiana

May 2009

Expected Date of Graduation
May 9, 2009

Abstract

The iMedia Project represents the future of the news industry: it utilizes personalization, portability, and convenience. Over the spring semester, a group of students and faculty continued developing a streamlined local news program for the iPhone. I helped to identify stories and other content for the program and created a series of video packages, all of which I have put onto a DVD. We published four weeks of content, and the coordinators of the iMedia Project assembled a test group to evaluate our product. We then continued to test the effectiveness of our designs and adapt our methods for the next group of iMedia students.

Artist's Statement

Convergence has been the news buzzword of my education. Professionals and students are constantly pushed to search for innovative ways to present content. News reporting on a mobile phone medium is one of the newest forms of journalism.

The iMedia Project is in its fourth year at Ball State University. Previous groups focused on designing and testing the effectiveness of an interactive television interface. This year, in addition to spanning two semesters for the first time, my group pushed content onto iPhones. Unlike using converter boxes for the television, which meant test subjects had to come to a particular room for viewing, smartphones are portable and convenient. This method of testing was better because it more accurately evaluated the way the subjects would use the application in everyday life.

The class was cross-disciplinary, comprised of students from journalism graphics, telecommunications, advertising sales, and computer science. We separated the content into four main groups: news, entertainment, weather, and sports. As a telecommunications student, I was primarily responsible for coming up with story ideas, setting up interviews, and creating video packages. Each story, however, also contained many multimedia elements: usually a written, graphic, and photo component.

I created all the video stories you see on my DVD. As in most of my other news classes, I set up the necessary interviews, shot the video on a PD-150 Sony camera, ingested and edited the video, wrote the scripts, and recorded the voiceover.

I first worked on the story about the animal shelter. Our class wondered if pet adoptions were up or down as a reflection of the economic recession. After talking to the staff at the Muncie Animal Shelter and PetSmart, I learned that adoptions at shelters have actually increased over the past year. They attribute the rise to the economy—instead of wanting to invest hundreds of dollars in new purebred pets, consumers settle for much cheaper stray animals.

Next, I worked on a story about “Tha Paper Boiz,” a new rap trio in Muncie. They made the popular “Chirp Chirp Song” that became a campus hit during football season. Unfortunately, the story was never published as a part of the project. It was a simple piece, just a profile of the new group and one of its songs.

My Name is Jerry is a feature-length film that was shot last summer in Muncie and starred alumnus Doug Jones. I did an extended interview with Jones last summer, and I cut pieces of that and used video shot by Ball State’s Institute of Digital Entertainment and Education to supplement it. I think this actually turned out to be one of the best pieces, though it was one of the easier packages for me to make.

For the past four years, I have been very involved with an entertainment television show called “The Reel Deal” at Ball State. When one of our members began describing another group he had recently joined, I couldn’t pass up the opportunity for my favorite story of the semester. The group re-enacts life in the middle ages, and members call themselves the “Society for Creative Anachronism.” They teach animal husbandry, sewing, cooking, gardening—and medieval fighting. I wrote a script and did a stand-up (where the reporter is on camera) as well. This piece turned out so well, I’m including it on my professional reel.

Ball State’s new geothermal project is a groundbreaking undertaking, but most students don’t really understand how the project will work or what it means for the university. I focused on the financial aspects of the project and organized an interview with James Lowe, Ball State’s Director of Engineering and Operations. He explained in our video interview that while the initial costs of installing the geothermal system will far exceed our normal heating costs, the university will eventually be saving money and helping the environment. An excellent graphic accompanied this story, which most of our test group said was their favorite.

Each month the city of Muncie organizes an Art Walk downtown that features local artists and

their innovative creations. One group from Ball State, the Muncie Max Users Group, found a way to create music by conducting electricity through potatoes. Though only a few people actually attended the event, it was a fun way to teach music and electricity to children. Additionally, it was a unique story for me: I'd never created a video package about a sound story before.

My final piece was on a fitting subject—graduation. I worked with another student to organize an interview with Joe Goodwin, the assistant director of Ball State's Career Center. He explained it's been more difficult this year for graduates to find jobs and land interviews. He's expecting more students to attend graduate school as they wait for the economy to improve. We also interviewed two graduating students, neither of which had found a job yet.

As a class, we discussed that the weekly meetings, our class time, weren't used as effectively as they could have been. We met for around an hour and a half on Wednesday afternoons, and all of our content had to be posted to the iMedia server by 5:00pm on Fridays. It might have helped more to have two shorter classes on Tuesday and Thursdays or to meet once a week on Mondays.

For four weeks in a row, we also used a research test group of 19 students who owned iPhones. They were each given \$100 for participating in the study, and they evaluated the usability and effectiveness of the iMedia application. The subjects were brought in for initial one-on-one discussions to make sure they were familiar with how to use the application. Then they reviewed the content each week and submitted their feedback surveys online. In the final week, the group met together. Our class was able to watch their discussion on four television monitors and through mirrored glass. They were informed that we could see and hear them.

In other classes I've taken, there's been no practical evaluation of the news content I've created. It was a completely new experience to have strangers offering feedback on my creations. Honestly, I was surprised at what they said.

Overwhelmingly, the test subjects said they preferred NATSOT pieces over traditional packages

with reporters' tracks. (NATSOT packages feature only the voices of the people being interviewed; there is no scripted reporter's voice like in most news packages.) Most of the news students, certainly including myself, had been trying to write scripts and create layered, lengthy packages. I was initially surprised to hear that viewers preferred the shorter pieces when traditional reporter packages are more popular on television. After consideration, it makes sense that mobile phone users—who are quick consumers focused on convenience—would typically prefer to watch their news in as little time as possible. Additionally, students preferred text captions in graphic pieces versus voiceovers.

The focus group said Ball State's wireless system prevented the application from loading very quickly, which was a frustration for them. They also agreed the forward and backward buttons on the browser were too close to the search bar. (You can see a photograph of the application following this written statement.) Actually, the group said they wanted to read more local content than we provided. This was encouraging; as the program becomes more successful, hopefully more students will want to be involved.

Students in the focus group said they rarely checked the weather on the iMedia application. Since they were using their iPhones, the Weather Channel application and various Web sites were able to give them a faster, more accurate forecast.

Focus group members enjoyed having more control than with most news applications and certainly more than with any other local news source. The content was relevant, and they said it was easy to understand the format of the application. The quality of the video improved at the end of the semester when we found the ideal compression rate for our packages.

The iMedia Project was an excellent way for me to use the skills I've learned in classrooms and apply them in a real-life news atmosphere. The interface is the future of news—portable, attractive, and interactive. The project has been completely created and published in the last five semesters; I can't wait to see what improvements will be made in the next year.

Top Stories

Back

Menu



BSU goes geothermal

BSU to install one of the nation's largest geothermal systems

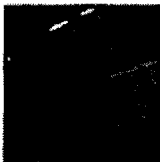
video, graphic story



Drag in Muncie

Get an inside look into the culture of going drag

video, graphic



Stan the Man

BSU football's new head man

video, graphic



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[Back](#)

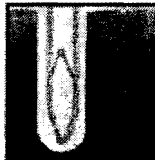
[Menu](#)



VIDEO

The bottom line

Is the university saving or spending?



GRAPHIC

Geothermal basics

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STORY

New system

Largest geothermal project not expected to affect students







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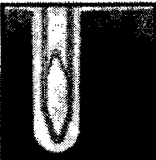
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Menu


[Back](#)[Menu](#)




[NEWS](#)[ENTERTAINMENT](#)[WEATHER](#)[SPORTS](#)



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STORY
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[Back](#)

[Menu](#)



BSU goes geothermal

BSU to install one of the nation's largest geothermal systems

video graphic story

AXE HAIR CRISIS RELIEF

GET GIRL-APPROVED HAIR

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Bailout hits Muncie

Find out how the bailout is affecting the Muncie community

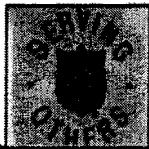
video story



Economy and BSU

A look at how today's downturn economy is affecting universities

video



Troubled Times

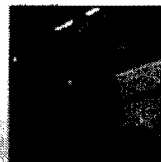
The Salvation Army finds it difficult to serve those in need

video chat

Sports

[Back](#)

[Menu](#)



Stan the Man

BSU football's new head man

[video](#), [graphic](#)



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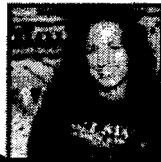
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BSU Swings Away

BSU golf uses video game like technology and gives helpful tips

[video](#), [graphic](#), [graphic](#)



Mind over matter

BSU swimmer Kaitlin Jasmon battles Myasthenia Gravis

[video](#), [graphic](#), [story](#)

Graphic

Back

Menu

Click on the Job Title to
learn more

HELLO

MY NAME IS

Unit Production Manager

Zach Baliva

Production Designer

Michael Bricker

HELLO

MY NAME IS

1st Assistant Director

Michael Chandler

2nd Assistant Director

Christian Guynn

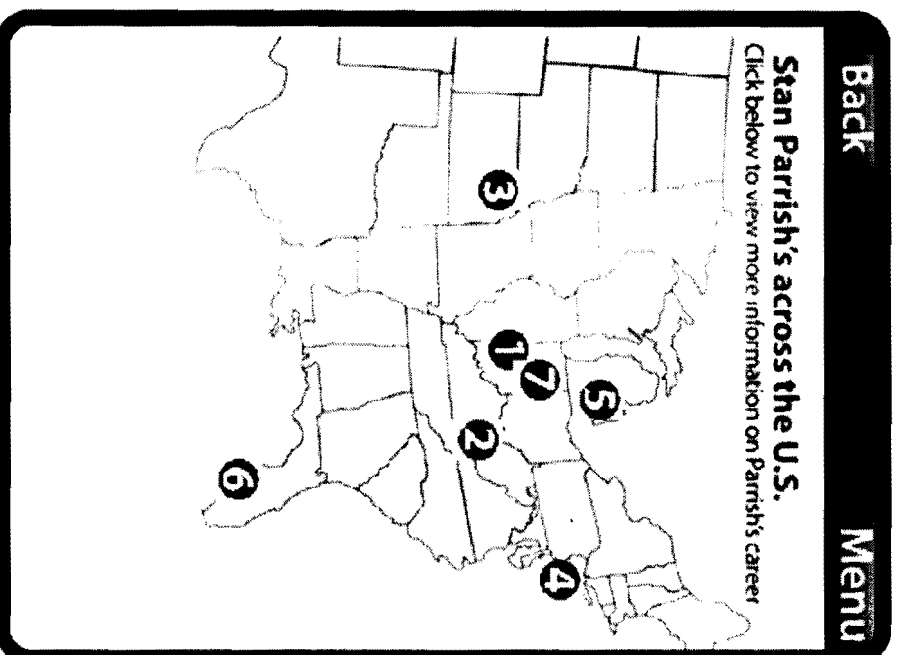
HELLO

MY NAME IS

Art Director

Jonathan Barger

Graphic



Weather

[Back](#)

[Menu](#)

Tue Apr 7 2009

High

40

Low

28

Cloudy, with a high near 40.
WNW wind 19 mph

Newslink Forecast

Today

5-day

Weather

Back

Menu

Five-Day Forecast

Tue Wed Thu Fri Sat



High	High	High	High	High
40	53	58	49	57

Low	Low	Low	Low	Low
28	34	42	36	33

Today

5-day

Acknowledgements

-I would like to thank Jennifer George-Palilonis, Assistant Professor of Journalism, for advising me throughout this project. I appreciate her expertise and willingness to allow students to take such an active role in the project.

-I would also like to thank the group of students and professors across many disciplines who are involved in the iMedia Project, especially Suzy Smith and Jeff Kew. Their creativity and diligence is raising the bar for other universities and professional media organizations.

-I appreciate the help and support of Dean Jim Ruebel and the Honors College, for bringing me to Ball State and being available and friendly over the past four years.

-My roommates and best friends—Abby Wells, Katie Nuss, Samantha Irons, and Leslie Collins—have always remind me about the importance of balance and truly want me to succeed.

-Most of all, I would like to thank my mother Winnie Johnson for everything always.